

Urban Form as Product:

Actors, Institutions, and Planning in Bangkok and Tokyo

Bart WISSINK

University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Urban planners tackle spatial problems through policies that adjust urban form. In the evaluation of these policies, planning studies tend to focus on urban planners and their success. However, urban planning is not the only practice determining urban developments. This paper perceives urban form as the outcome of a broad range of goal-oriented actors whose actions are structured by institutional settings. It illustrates this argument by comparing two Asian cities with a profoundly different urban form: fragmented Bangkok and integrated Tokyo. Spatial variations are interpreted as a result of goal-oriented actors and structuring practices. The influences of planning strategies turn out to be relative to these actor-setups and settings. This observation results in some suggestions for planning in contemporary city regions.

Keywords: urban form, urban planning, institutions, actors, Bangkok, Tokyo

New Partitionings of the City

It is by now well documented that the emergence of the post-industrial or network society results in enormous spatial transformations. On the one hand, this restructuring accommodates economic and social-cultural globalization; on the other the social effects of changes are rendered problematic. Well-quoted authors like Davis, Sorkin, Sennett, Castells, Graham & Marvin, and Zukin draw attention to the fact that city regions become 'fragmented', 'splintered' or 'partitioned'. They stress that the rich are disconnecting themselves spatially from the poor, and are retreating in the pseudo-public spaces of shopping malls, golf clubs and gated communities. The public space of the enlightenment project – a generally accessible, free and safe space that emerged in the context of the nation state – is being replaced by collective but exclusive spaces that are selectively connected.

Trevor Boddy (1992: 125) thus signals the emergence of analogues cities.

Attention for 'spatial resegmentation' is accompanied by fears for the disappearance of old public spaces, and with them the changes for different social groups to meet. Since splintering is supposed to hinder face-to-face interactions between groups – the sort of interaction that was constitutive of the emergence of modern society in Europe in the first place – it is easily perceived as a threat to community and democracy. Crawford (1999) therefore signals that a 'narrative of loss' frames the analysis of urban restructuring. This narrative "contrasts the current debasement of public space with golden ages and golden sites – the Greek agora, the coffeehouses of early modern Paris and London, the Italian piazza, the town square. The narrative nostalgically posits these as once vital sites of democracy where, allegedly, cohesive public discourse thrived, and inevitably culminates in the contemporary crisis of public life and public space, a crisis that puts at risk the very ideas and institutions of democracy itself" (Crawford, 1999: 23). Others like Arefi (1999), Banarjee (2001) and Marcuse & Van Kempen (2002) echo this observation of a negative framing of urban restructuring. Interestingly, in an analysis of the Middle Eastern or Arab city, Elsheshtawy (2004: 3-7) finds a similar negative interpretation.

When framed through the 'narrative of loss', the urban development of cities seems to pose serious questions. Most of all, it seems to imply that spatial resegmentation will undermine social coherence. However, close inspection exposes several glitches to the 'narrative of loss'. For instance, it wrongly links urban form directly and causally to social interactions, as if segmented cities necessitate limited contacts. Also, it wrongly presupposes that the world of yesteryear was an integrated social world, thus downplaying the immense importance of borders in a world of nation states. Furthermore, it overlooks variations in the local valuation and in the political attitudes towards social hierarchy and mixed living, thus overlooking the fact that Asian indifference seems to contrast European and Northern American worries. But most important for now, the narrative wrongly frames spatial fragmentation as the aggregated outcome of the housing preferences of elites that act in urban contexts the world over and all lead to the same results: fragmentation.

Now, of course the preferences of powerful and influential groups play a role in urban restructuring, for instance in the emergence of new housing enclaves. However, at the same time from an institutional point of view it seems clear that variations in political economies and the characteristics of the organization of building provisions profoundly influence the local outcomes of elite strategies or preferences. Therefore, the elitist and demand-oriented view of the narrative of loss should be supplemented with an attention to regimes of supply. And such an understanding of the driving forces behind spatial resegmentation is especially important when looking for measures to counter the negative consequences of splintering urban form; after all, interventions can only be successful when based on sound understanding.

This paper wants to contribute to this task by outlining an actor-centered institutional framework on the urban form of city regions. First, it will outline such a framework. Then the cities of Bangkok, Thailand and Tokyo, Japan are introduced. Paragraph five explains the differences between fragmented Bangkok and integrated Tokyo from the institutional setup in which space in both metropolises is produced. The concluding paragraph will draw conclusions on spatial restructuring, as well as indicate consequences for urban intervention and for research into the urban form.

Urban Form as Product

The explanation of the urban form of city regions is full of conceptual problems. First of all, the concept of urban form itself is not clear (Bourne, 1982; Wu, 1995; Lefebvre, 1996). This obscurity results from the abundance of perspectives – like neoclassical economics, urban ecology, and institutional analysis – from which urban form is studied (Lake, 1983). In general, these perspectives focus on the physical make up of the built environment. For instance, Bourne (1982: 41) gives a list of criteria for urban spatial structure, subdivided over context factors (like timing and functional character), macro form (like scale, shape, networks), internal form and function (like density, homogeneity, concentricity, connectivity), and organization and behavior (like goal orientation and organizing principles). This list already shows the multi-faceted character of urban form.

Especially up to the 1980s, a variety of studies focused in different ways on the development of the ‘urban form’, the ‘urban spatial structure’, the ‘spatial pattern’, or the ‘internal structure’ of cities. This attention has resulted in numerous books (Chapin & Kaiser, 1979; Bourne, 1982; Lake, 1983; Hillier & Hanson, 1984; Whitehand & Larkham, 1992; Wu, 1995; Kostof, 1999; Conzen & Conzen, 2004). Also, already in 1974 the International Seminar on Urban Form was established, which publishes its own specialized magazine *Urban Morphology*. Meanwhile, attention has been scattered over disciplines like architecture and geography with independent research traditions: topomorphologists and space syntax within architecture, the Conzenian tradition and spatial analysis within geography to name a few (Whitehand, 2001). And although attention for urban form waned over the 1980s, it has re-emerges due to the mentioned worries over the social impacts of urban splintering (Graham & Marvin, 2002).

It is not the aim of this paper to analyze the relationships between these approaches. For now it suffices to single out two perspectives on urban form that necessitate corrections. On the one hand, urban form sometimes implicitly or explicitly is perceived as natural outcome of historical landscapes in which agency does not get attention. According to such perspectives, the hyper dense

urban form of Hong Kong is explained by the existence of mountains; the concentric circles of Amsterdam are the result of water; and high-rise Manhattan results from the location on an Island. Naturalistic perspectives that regard urban form as natural product downplay the importance of actors in the creation of urban form. They start from a mistaken absolute conception of space in which space is regarded as a container that pre-exists objects and develops according to its own rules, and subjects 'in' space; space as stage on which social processes are played out and objects are distributed. Several authors like Giddens, Castells, Urry and others have pointed out that such a perspective misses the point how actors actively 'make' spaces – not only symbolically but also physically (Gregory & Urry, 1985).

In line with this critique, in recent years the absolute conception of space was replaced by a relational conception in which space is perceived as product of social relations (Urry, 1995: 1-30; Graham & Healey, 1999). However, here a second commentary is needed on theories that regard urban form as the product of goal-oriented actors. Recent publications especially highlight the symbolic production of space. Central to these analyses is the idea that 'representations' of space differ, and that these differences relate to variations in the positions of actors and related identities, resources and goals. This leads to the conclusion that there is not one objective space as a stage on which social processes occur, but a multitude of spaces that relate to the everyday experience of various groups. This diversity expresses social relations.

However, there is a second – although related – way for thinking about space as a product (Low, 1996; Asbeek Brusse & Wissink, 2002; Yurcenar, 2006: 33-36). This second perspective on space as product does not focus on symbolic space, but instead regards physical space as product. The prime assumption of this perspective is the idea that physical urban form of city regions is itself an expression of social relations and power distribution. Such a perspective is employed in two ways. First, it is used historically; for instance by showing how the differences between the urban form of the Medieval, the industrial and the post-industrial city are the result of changing social relations (Soja, 2000: 1-144). Secondly, the perspective of physical space as product can be used to analyze differences in the urban form of different city regions around the world. The open European city with its public squares is then contrasted to the closed and inward looking private collective spaces of the Arab city and it is shown how these differences in space for instance are the results of varying gender relations (Yurcenar, 2006: 33-36).

Now the observation that space is physically and symbolically produced seems to orient attention towards producers of space, i.e. the elites of the narrative of loss. However, for quite some time, urban theory criticizes an over-emphasis on consumer demand as driving force behind the production of space (Lake, 1983: ix-xxv). Stemming from neo-classical economics, demand oriented approaches see residential and other patterns as the end product of consumer choice,

operating within various markets. Thereby, they fail to appreciate the role of production side factors is the development of space. The institutional constraints approach develops a supply-oriented research design in which institutional constraints on consumption and production are central.

In short, differences in urban form have to be understood as human-made differences structure by landscapes; and human mediation is the result of goal-oriented social action, but at the same time agency is structured by institutional settings in which structuring rules and resources are embedded. Men and women thus make space, but not under conditions of their own choosing, to elaborate on the well-known adagio of Marx. In terms of Giddens, rules and resources structure the interaction of goal-oriented actors that are involved in the production of spaces. Therefore, an analysis of urban form as a product always also has to be an institutional analysis. A comparison of Bangkok and Tokyo can illustrate the outlines of such an interpretation of urban form as product.

Bangkok – City of Mubahnchatsan

For a new visitor, Bangkok and Tokyo seem to have a lot in common. These enormous urban regions consist of seemingly endless series of uniform and characterless concrete buildings that are intersected by concrete infrastructures, now and then intermixed with ancient temples. Internally, these build up areas consist of radical mixtures of land-use functions and building types: high-rise next to low, old next to new, rich next to poor and polluting next to vulnerable. And the dynamism in these urban areas is enormous. Street life is an constant flux and next year the urban layout might be totally different. Typical local symbols like the script on neon signs or Tuktuks in Bangkok apart, these cities do not seem to diver that much.

However, a further analysis soon exposes marked differences. Because of its location in the middle of the Chaopraya delta, Bangkok has for long been a city of water; the Venice of the East. As late as the first decades of the twentieth century, boat trips on this maze of canals that together made up Bangkok provided the main mode of transportation. Only hereafter, roads started to get more attention. Internally, the urban pattern was characterized by small-scale settlements in which Thai and Chinese lived separated in closed communities (Askew, 2000: 13-106). So, small-scale local communities characterized the urban pattern of Bangkok, and the whole of Thailand for that matter.

Not until the Thai economic boom in the 1960s, did things really start to change. Bangkok quickly transformed from a developing country's national capital, into a global production place and later again into a regional service center. Meanwhile, the urban population started to grow: according to official statistics from two to six million inhabitants and the city now takes up an area of forty-by-forty kilometers. Conceptually, this urban field can be subdivided into core city,

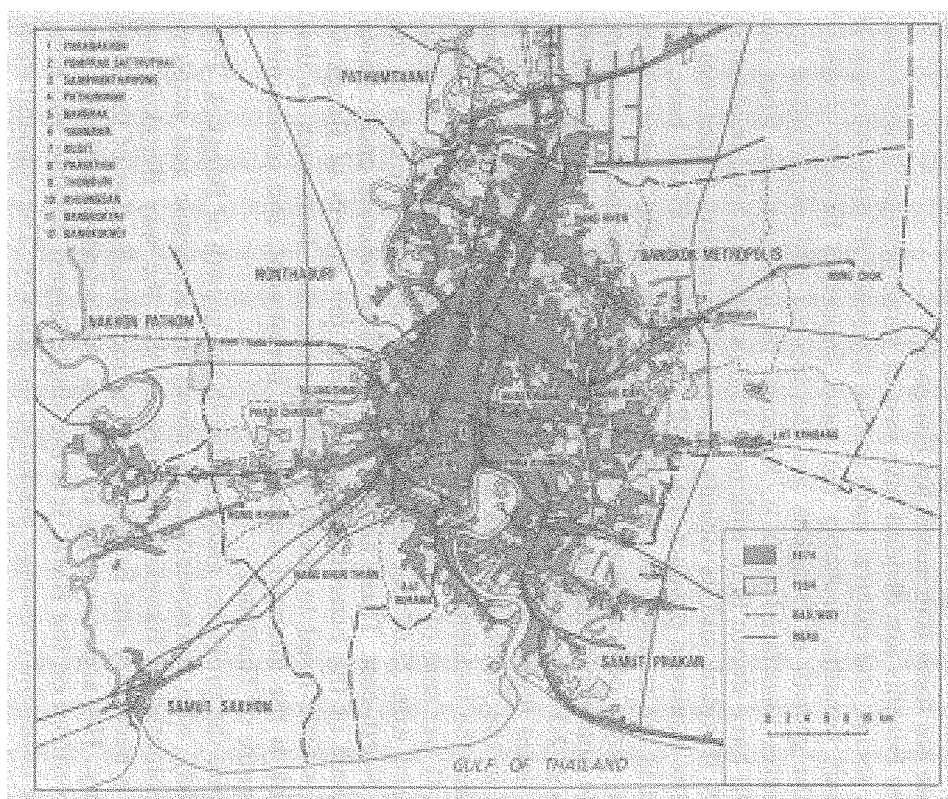


Figure 1: Bangkok and suburbs (Krongkaew 1999: 317)

suburban Bangkok, and peri-urban Bangkok – the quickly urbanizing areas of industrial zones along the roads towards peripheral cities (Webster, 2004).

Bangkok's core city consists of the 1960s built up area of condominiums, townhouses and shop houses. As a result of the almost constant influx of a poor rural population from rural regions and neighboring countries, informal slum communities have grown between the formal urban neighborhoods of the core city.. In these slum-areas like the port-community of Klong Toey, inhabitants live nearby their multiple formal and informal work locations where they earn there limited amounts of Thai baht. Pre-existing contacts with family or village members often determine the location where urban immigrants come to live. Over the last decennia, industries as well as richer inhabitants have been moving out of the urban core into the suburbs where land is cheap and available. As a result, service industries now dominate Bangkok's core area. These industries have developed in a multi-core fashion: finances (Silom), tourism (Sukhumvit and Kao Sarn), leisure (Sukhumvit, RCA and Ratchada Phisek) and government (Rattanakosin and Chaeng Wattana) are located in distinct separate zones. The urban pressure on the core area is big. Accessibility was a disaster until the development of new partly privately financed infrastructures like the Skytrain, new

motorways and the metro in the 1990s. Along the nodes of these new infrastructures high-speed reconstruction results in concentrated multiple land use complexes. At the same time however, even in these core development centers, vacant lots abound.

In suburban Bangkok, the urban structure is totally different. Here land-use is extensive and the built-up area has a typical plot-like setup, resulting from the gradual conversion of former rice paddies into urban functions. Lasting rise paddies, industrial plots, and gated housing estates alternate. Bangkok's suburban area represents a 'Desakota' style plot-wise urbanization (McGee, 1987). What results is a patchwork of walled plots. Within this patchwork, high-rise buildings, regional shopping malls like Future Park Rangsit, factories, and office blocks are shooting up. Former irrigation canals – or klong – form the backbone of this patchwork urbanization pattern. Along these two to five mile long straight canals, ill-developed roads connect individual plots to the larger urban area. These roads feed off scarce and often-jammed main roads that in turn are connected to motorways. Public transportation is underdeveloped, uncomfortable and slow. As a result, inhabitants mainly rely on cars, further engraving the problematic traffic situation in Bangkok. As in the core area, infrastructure quality is substandard due to lacking public and private funding.

Various types of Housing Estates characterize residential urbanization along Bangkok's suburban klong roads. These 'Mubahnchatsan' – which translates as 'developed village' – are depicted as the modern day version of the classic Thai village. Because of the single style housing types within each of these mubahnchatsan, there is a strong income selection of inhabitants; higher-middleclass amongst higher-middleclass and lower amongst lower. In addition, high-middleclass Bangkokians do own condominiums in the expat-oriented core city, where they stay on working days. And next to the suburban and peri-urban factories new slums are emerging to house cheap labor workers. In all, in Bangkok the social-economic stratification also is spatially significant.

Tokyo – City of 'Cho'

The situation in Tokyo differs markedly. Like Bangkok, this city has a long history that also expresses itself in the current physical and symbolic space. This historical spatial structuring goes at least back to Togukawa Japan (1600-1868), when Tokyo was still called Edo, the eastern capital (Sorensen, 2002: 11-44). Togukawa society was founded on a rigid feudal system of four hereditary classes: samurai (warriors), peasants, artisans and merchants. Outside of this class system were monks and outcast groups like the eta and hinin. Class society had its spatial equivalent. Edo was build up out of separate areas for commoners (machi-chi) and for samurai (buke-chi) and additional temple areas (jisha-chi). Because the commoner areas were located at the lower plains to the east

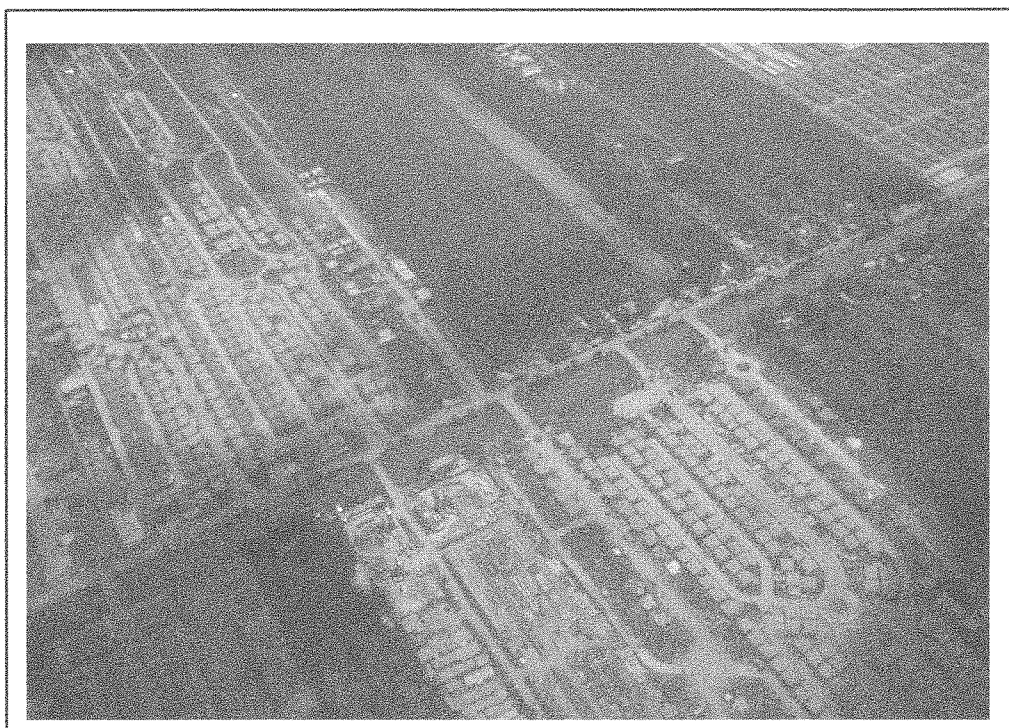


Figure 2: Plot-wise development along a klong in the Rangsit area

of Edo and between the hills of western Edo a specific spatial layout emerged. Central in Edo was Edo castle, the palace of the shogun, leader of reunited Japan. East of the castle, in the delta of the Sumida, Arakawa and Edogawa River, was the 'low city' or Shitamachi, where artisans and merchants lived in the commoners areas. West of Edo the hilly Kanto region stretched away towards the first mountains some hundred kilometers away. In Edo, that higher hilly area – or Yamanote – was the location of the daimyo estates – the Edo residences of the regional feudal lords – that were surrounded by the buke-chi of the samurai. Yamanote represented the world of better off Edo. Edo internally and externally thus was a segregated city: spatial form expressed and maintained social relations and power (Jinnai, 1995: 17).

The forced opening up of Japan in 1868 meant the end of Tokugawa rule. Edo changed into Tokyo and a new era of rapid modernization started. This implied a breaching of the hermetic world of the ancient aristocracy in the Yamanote. The intruding rich provincial and Edo merchant families were unburdened by tradition, resulting in conflicts that are beautifully portrayed in Mishima Yukio's novel *Spring Snow*. That the contrast between Shitamachi and Yamanote not only was a spatial contrast, but was a contrast of social organization and culture as well (Seidensticker, 1983).

During the so-called Meiji restoration (1868-1912), class society was demolished, and ever

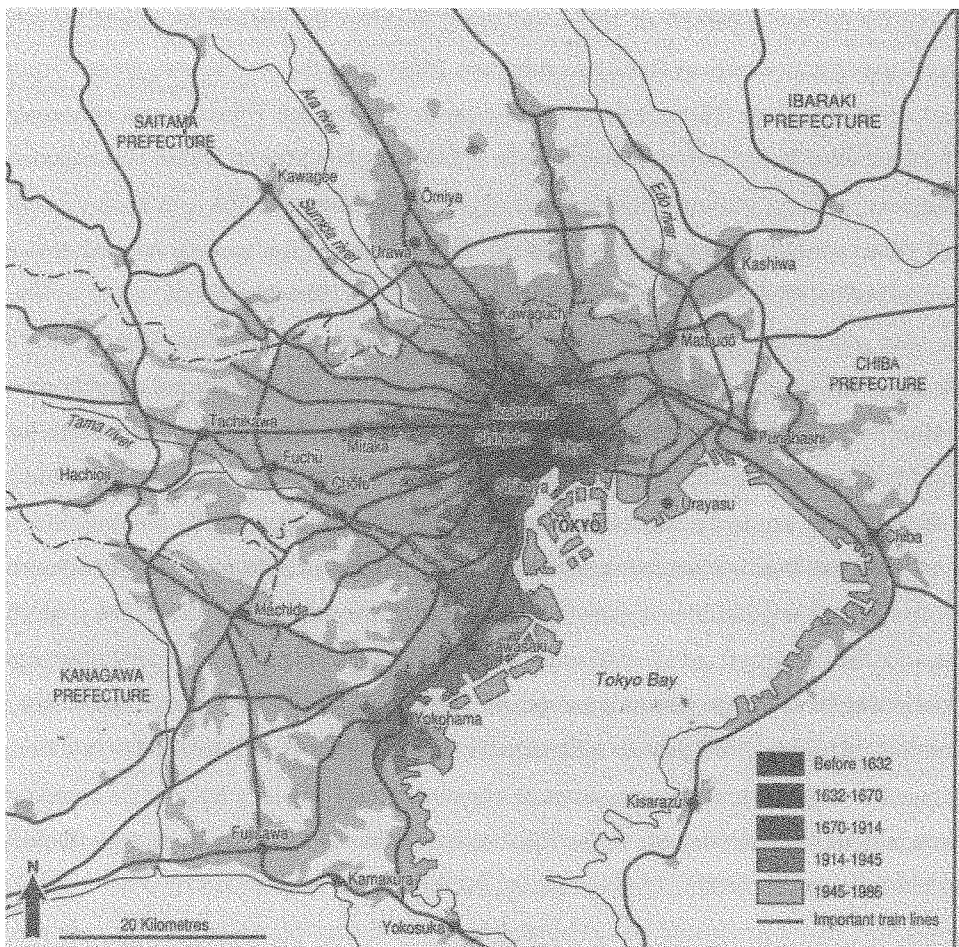


Figure 3: The development of Tokyo (Source: Cybriwsky 1991: 132).

since formal distinctions have been mistrusted in Japan. Formally, everybody is equal, an opinion that is echoed by the emphasis of the Japanese on the absence of class differences over the last decades. The Meiji restoration also implied modernization and thus rapid urbanization. This heralded the start of the growth of Tokyo into the largest urban conglomeration in the world. During this process, various urban cores like Tokyo, Yokohama, Saitama, Kamakura and Kawasaki were joined into one giant urban region of eighty by eighty kilometers with a total of more than 32 million inhabitants.

Despite this urban growth, over the last decades the population of central Tokyo – the area of Edo and the early suburbs – has diminished. This is the result of the exodus of families and industries because of high land prices and the return of service companies. The most recognizable urban structure in this core area is the Yamanote line, a publicly operated train line that circles the original Yamanote area. The main stations on this line – Ueno, Tokyo, Shibuya, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro

– make up for the prime centers of Tokyo and are themselves the connection points for privately developed and operated railway lines into suburban Tokyo, like the well known Denen Toshi Line (Cervero, 1998: 181-210). Through these radial train lines, suburban Tokyo is well connected with the central city and its various centers for work and leisure. In addition, within and outside of the Yamanote line, a finely grained metro system has emerged. Externally, Tokyo is connected to other regional centers by the Shinkansen high-speed train and through a well-developed network of motorways, both of which were developed in the advent of the 1964 Olympics.

The road grid in the central city consists of a relatively underdeveloped network of main roads. Behind these main roads lies a gathering of remarkably calm, almost tranquil neighborhoods or 'cho'. Here, the streets are characterized by a dense plot-wise built up area of mainly low-rise buildings that contrast with the high-rises along the main roads. A striking illustration of the central importance of the 'cho' is the address system that does not take roads as its building blocks like almost everywhere else, but instead starts from the subdivision of Tokyo into neighborhoods. The neighborhood segmentation in part goes back to the cho-organization of Edo and Tokyoites have a clear view of the meanings and identities of specific 'cho' and its inhabitants. And although specific 'cho' since long have a high standing and others like Daikanyama or Roppongi experience urban regeneration, within the 'cho' there is a remarkable mixture of types of inhabitants. This can partly be attributed to neighborhood organizations or chonakai that since long have had a central role in the functioning of the everyday life in the 'cho', thus reproducing historical identities (Dore, 1958; Bestor, 1992; Sugimoto, 2002: 272-276; Hendry, 2005: 62-81).

In response to the exodus of industries and families, diverse places in the city core are being redeveloped into highly specialized consumption places and office spaces. Recently, new high-density multifunctional developments like Roppongi Hills and the Tokyo Midtown Project have set the new standard. Because of their sheer size and the heights, the buildings do not easily fit into to existing urban fabric, although government involvement stimulates private investments for urban linkages. Because of the prominent role of Tokyo in ICT and related creative industries – one of the main growth drivers in Japan – Tokyo till now is the only Japanese metropolitan area that does not suffer a declining population (Takahashi & Sugiura, 1996).

The general situation in Tokyo's suburban areas contrasts sharply. Here low-rise housing zones stretch seemingly endless until the urban horizon. Individual prefab houses on small plots that border each other with almost none existing margins, are the main building blocs of these suburban neighborhoods. Small-scale factories, shops, bars, and agricultural plots alternate them. Again, the railway system forms the backbone to this suburban world. Around railway stations main nodes of leisure and shopping have emerged. Open space mainly results from hard-to-build mountainous areas, anti- earthquake relief areas, and flooding prevention areas in the riverbeds.

Explaining differences

This survey of the urban form of Bangkok and Tokyo in part shows similar developments. First of all, although these city regions have different histories, they both have experienced vast territorial expansion and enormous growing numbers of inhabitants. A second similarity is the dynamic relationship in the development between core city and suburbs where in both cities the core city loses industry and residents to the suburbs, which are replaced by service industries.

At the same time, there is a remarkable contrast between the urban form of both city regions and the distribution of population over this form. Despite its gigantic size, Tokyo's urban form emerges as a relatively integrated fabric in which the different elements (plots, neighborhoods, streets, buildup area, open space) are linked together by a well-developed railway system. The 'cho' themselves seem to be internally integrated and harbor mixed inhabitants. They have a specific identity but are not physically demarcated. So the urban landscape of Tokyo is fragmented, but the means for this fragmentation is not physical but symbolic. In contrast, Bangkok has an fragmented fabric that is linked by road-infrastructure. The autonomous elements of walled enclaves only relate to each other selectively. The city is a patchwork of walled mono-cultural enclaves. So the social fragmentation of Bangkok and Tokyo is expressed differently in and through space.

Now, as argued before, an explanation of these differences in urban form can focus on several factors. First, the physical setup of the natural landscape in which both urban regions emerged can be used as an explaining factor. Such a naturalist explanation would stress the water-rich rice-paddy landscape as main explanatory factor for the plot-wise urban extension of Bangkok. However, in line with critique of the sociology of technology theorists, such an explanation does not bring into focus how human action structures physical objects like landscapes. For instance, it misconceives the watery rice-paddy landscape as natural and does not take into account that that landscape itself has been created historically as well.

A second line of enquiry that was criticized in the second paragraph would analyze the emerging urban form as the result of housing preferences of Bangkok citizens. According to this line of reasoning, Bangkok developers built gated plot-wise mubahnchatsan because the inhabitants of Bangkok want to live there. This approach has been criticized because it does not bring into focus how demand is structured by supply, and how the production of space itself is structured as well. Therefore, the actor-centered institutional framework that has been proposed in this paper looks for additional explanations for the variations in urban form. This approach seeks out the central actors in the production of urban places that have historically emerged in both settings, and the rules and resources that structure the interactions between these actors. An application of this perspective on

the developments of suburban Bangkok and Tokyo can illustrate the type of analysis that results.

Explaining the urban form of suburban Bangkok

Bangkok inhabitants have a strong preference for suburban living, and buying a villa with garden is an important middle-class ambition. And over the past decades, the possibilities to buy such a house have been supported by the development of the mortgage system. However, as stated before, understanding these demand side characteristics does not suffice to understand the emerging urban form. For that we have to turn to the institutional setting in which housing is supplied by profit seeking actors that have emerged historically.

In Bangkok, a relatively small group of real estate developers decides over suburban projects. These developers are related to a restricted amount of economic conglomerates that centre around banks and together control the Thai economy (Hewison, 1981; Suehiro, 1992; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2002: 95-222). These conglomerates also have direct links to Thai national and regional politics. During an economic boom like the one in the 1980s, excess capital will not only be used for innovations in the primary production process, but is also channeled into real estate development. The low building costs through cheap materials and labor further the attractiveness of real estate development.

While starting a suburban development, one of the structuring factors is the bad state of Bangkok soil in combination with potential flooding because of substandard water management systems that result of lacking investments in public works. Therefore, developers will have to prepare the plots themselves and they will have to develop relatively large-scale projects to make this lucrative. So, the first challenge is finding sizable plots. The plot-wise development of suburban Bangkok is further structured by the land-subdivision law, which poses specific conditions for developments larger than nine houses (like the obligation to establish a neighborhood commission).

Because of substandard transportation infrastructures, again as a result of lacking investments due to absent institutional provisions, these plots have to be located close to infrastructure nodes. Finding such plots happens on a private land market (Dowall, 1992). Local land brokers 'help' in this process. So, the availability of sizable plots determines the location of developments. The developer then has to arrange for the necessary infrastructures on the plot himself. Because the infrastructure provision is linked to neighborhood development, and inhabitants can all use these services, the service fees have to be comparable. Therefore, the houses have to be within a comparable prize range. And since the development on neighboring plots is uncertain and contrasts with neighboring activities might be big, the first thing a developer does after buying a plot is building a fence. This practice of fencing plots fits in with the private provision of most services in

suburban neighborhoods.

At the same time, government influence on suburban development is small. It is true that with the emergence of provisions for the Bangkok Metropolitan Region to make spatial plans, the absence of government regulation was discontinued. However, limited instrumentation of this planning competence, widespread corruption, and direct links of real estate investors with politics in practice turn out to result in building approval for development plans that might not fit in with the official policies. At the same time, it is very difficult for government to realize desirable developments. High land prices and lacking public resources result in impotent public actors. Constructing public parks or public infrastructures is almost impossible. For these provisions government is dependent on private investments. This is illustrated by the fact that private parties (motor ways and the Skytrain) or national government (Metro) finance the development of infrastructures in Bangkok over the last decades.

Now, the distribution of inhabitants over the developing urban form, of course is influenced by consumer considerations. But since most houses in suburban Bangkok are built in walled mubahnchatsan, consumers do not seem to have a lot to choose. As a result, the height of the potential mortgage and the houses currently on offer, determine in which specific neighborhood they will live. All the same, this does fit in with housing preferences. Mubahnchatsan houses are valued because of their safety, and especially because they provide a relative degree of investment security in a city where government can decide to plan new developments just like that. Furthermore, living in a mono-cultural mubahnchatsan fits in with the Thai culture of hierarchy in which knowing your proper place is an important virtues. Bangkokians want to life amongst their own group. However, most of these preference characteristics exist in Tokyo as well, but the emerging urban form was shown to differ. Therefore we turn to an analysis of housing supply in Tokyo.

Explaining the urban form of suburban Tokyo

Like the inhabitants of Bangkok, Tokyoites prefer a single detached house with a garden on a private plot of land. However, again this does not suffice to explain urban form. So once more, we need to understand the dynamics of housing supply. The institutional setting of suburban housing supply in Tokyo turns out to vary from the Bangkok situation. Here railway companies are main actors in the production of suburban space. The open attitude towards foreign developments during the Meiji restoration coincided with the age of railway development in Western Europe (Sorensen, 2002: 59-60). Following foreign examples, in Japan private companies were created that were stimulated to develop railway lines within a framework provided by national government.

In suburban Tokyo, private railway companies then started to buy large tracts of suburban land

under the 'land readjustment' schemes. The land appreciation induced by the railway development resulted in gains that in turn were invested into railway development. Railway companies thus not only functioned as builders and operators of railways, but also became real estate developers. In addition, these companies developed the train stations themselves, building shopping malls and other services. And they developed public services like roads and parks in the neighborhoods circling the train stations. By developing interesting attractions along the railway lines, the train companies also made sure that the operation costs of the railways were balanced by the incomes. So train companies developed into giant conglomerates like Tokyu Corporation that were transporters, developers, and retailers and service operators at the same time. This setup was so successful that national and local government have started to emulate these practices (Cervero, 1998; Sorensen, 2002: 137-142).

This institutional setup of railway companies had a structuring influence on the production of suburban space in Tokyo. Railway lines were built with the yields from the development and allocation of land, resulting from rising land prices. Service provisions around railway stations – schools, universities, and shopping malls – stimulated a balanced use of the railway lines, guaranteeing a healthy exploitation of the train lines. As a result, railway companies stimulated mixed housing and mixed functions because this helped the economic basis of the railway lines. Furthermore, railway companies became responsible for the enhancement of sound and enchanting environments around railway stations, and in neighborhoods. Private railway companies thus invested private money into public provisions and the same time creating an integrated urban form.

This logic of the railway companies as producers of space fits in with consumer preferences that focus on privately owned single detached housing. Private owners were allowed to build such houses, mainly prefab, on the plots that were allocated by the railway companies. So while housing preferences in Bangkok and Tokyo differ drastically and consumer wishes seem to be met in both city regions, the resulting urban form is very different. An explanation of these differences necessitates attention to the production of space, in addition to attention for the natural characteristics of landscapes and consumption characteristics.

Conclusion: The importance of actor-settings and institutions

In conclusion, the variations in urban form between Bangkok and Tokyo can be explained by the differences between the historically emerged actors that produce space in both city regions and the institutional settings that structure their actions. Bangkok is a car-based city, because nobody ever created institutional provisions for infrastructure development in any other direction. Partly because of the early reliance on water networks for transportation, until recently, neither public nor private

actors existed that bothered about the opening up of the suburbs and adequate infrastructure was never developed. As a result, project developers when starting a project look for well-connected plots of land, develop the rest of the necessary services and infrastructures themselves and do not bother about the neighboring areas. Privately financed services also leads to a uniform composition of the housing stock within *mubahnchatsan* – everybody has to contribute an equal share – which results in a selection of inhabitants. And because developers and inhabitants alike do not have a relationship with the surroundings, building walls fits in nicely.

The situation in Tokyo is very different. Here institutional provisions for railway development by government in the Meiji period resulted in the establishment of private railway companies with considerable budgets. These companies have been using land-readjustment schemes – another institutional provision – to develop suburban Tokyo. So Tokyo became a train-led city because of created actors and fitting institutional provisions. Later, these train companies developed integrated business models in which developing train lines goes hand in hand with suburban spatial development; and because the train companies developed shopping malls and other services at train stations as well, they also guaranteed a steady income on train exploitation. Furthermore, because they wanted a mixed rider ship on their trains, they did not plan for segregated neighborhoods either.

So, not differences in housing preferences, but supply characteristics seem to be the main factor in explaining differing suburban form. And although the regimes of the production of space in both countries are private, the outcomes are very different. And it turns out that private regimes can serve public functions, as in Tokyo.

This conclusion on the causes for the differences in the urban form of Bangkok and Tokyo and its explanation leads to three suggestions for urban planning. First and foremost, it shows that the institutional setting in which the production of space takes place can be a major determining factor for the characteristics of the urban form of city regions. The different urban forms of suburban Bangkok and Tokyo are determined by differing historically emerged actors that operated in different institutional settings: privately operating real estate developers that solely concentrate on housing production in Bangkok vis-à-vis railway companies that take care of the mixed provision of neighborhood facilities, housing plots, shopping malls, train lines, train operations and other services. And these actors operate within differing sets of rules and with differing resources. As a consequence, policy discussions about urban form and the possibilities for governments to adjust this should not primarily focus on goal-oriented policies that try to direct urban development – as is for instance often the case in anti-sprawl and anti-fragmentation policies – but in stead should take historically emerged actors and the institutional setting in which they operate as its starting point. First of all, this implies that urban form cannot be chosen as such but already is pre-structured by

institutional settings. Missing this point will lead to over-enthusiastic public or private policies. Secondly, changes in the institutional setting can – knowingly or unknowingly – have major consequences on urban form. This means that discussions on possible changes in this institutional setting also have to take possible consequences for urban form in account.

A second conclusion is that private regimes of the production of space lead to differing outcomes. Especially striking is the conclusion that – in part because of smart government regulation – private regimes can result in the provision of public services through private parties. The suburban development of Tokyo clearly shows that private profit making through the simultaneous development of train lines, railway tracks and shopping malls can go hand in hand with public gains. But also in Bangkok, the privately financed Skytrain helps alleviate virtually unsolvable traffic problems. Thus, government regulations can exercise influence because they negotiates with private development instead of against it. Barter agreements turn out to produce real results for public service provision, provided that the institutional arrangements are right; a conclusion that is especially interesting for the Western European planning systems that heavily rely on public action.

A third conclusion is that government intervention in Bangkok and Tokyo varies from place to place and project to project. On the one hand, through large-scale public investment, government realizes specific development projects that are deemed important like the Shinkansen or motorway schemes in Tokyo or the metro and airport development in Bangkok. On the other hand, as was shown under the second conclusion, at the same time private initiatives create large-scale urban developments as well, without government intervention. Government thus definitely has an influence on the outcomes of urban form through government projects and the negotiation of institutional settings as pre-conditions for the operations of others. But at the same time, governments are not the only actors creating urban form. In policies to counter 'splintering urbanism' governments would be very wise to reflect on that relative position!

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